

THE SON OF MAN IS COMING

Luke 21:1-38

Key Verse: 21:27

"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

The headline of an article in the New York Times last week read: "Apocalyptic Thoughts Amid Nature's Chaos? You Could Be Forgiven." We had several natural and man-made events that made us feel like the end times, including terror attacks, nuclear bomb test in North Korea, earthquake in Mexico, massive floods in Texas caused by Hurricane Harvey, and then Hurricane Irma ripping up the Caribbean and Florida.

In today's passage, Jesus teaches us about the signs of the end times. When ominous things happen around us, we become anxious. What we need is a clear spiritual sense to view this world so that we may know why these things happen and what the future will be like for us. When we have a clear vision in God, we don't have to live in fear and anxiety. Instead, we can fulfill God's mission and purpose for our lives with confidence. In this passage, Jesus assures us about our future by reminding us his glorious second coming.

Before we study the details of Jesus' words, let me summarize what the Bible says about the end.

1) Jesus will come back to judge the world

"My Father's house has many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you ... (And) I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:2-3).

2) No one knows exact time of his return

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:2).

3) We should long for his return and be ready for it

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Mt 24:44).

I. SIGNS OF THE END TIMES (5-19)

Look at verses 5-6. *Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."* Some of Jesus' disciples were impressed by the beautiful temple buildings. The temple in Jerusalem at that time had been originally built by Ezra after the return from exile in the 6th century B.C. But it was desecrated by the Maccabees soon afterward, and now Herod the Great was expanding it enormously. Herod's project took more than 80 years to finish. It was a beautiful, imposing structure with a significant history. The buildings were indeed spectacular. Massive white marble stones were used, some of them over sixty feet long. The eastern front of the building

complex was covered with plates of gold so that it reflected the rays of the rising sun. The temple was a culmination of art and architectural triumph of the times.

The disciples were impressed by the magnificence of the buildings. Perhaps, they were even more impressed by the religious leaders, who were strolling the temple courts in their elegant purple robes. The disciples envied them for their privileges, luxury and high social status. Maybe they couldn't hide their feelings of inferiority. They couldn't wait for the earthly messianic kingdom they thought Jesus was going to establish. They were blinded by the glittering things of the world that they could not have a clear spiritual sense. They were supposed to be the future movers and shakers of history in God, but their spiritual vision was clouded by their human desires.

Jesus understood their temptation. So he told them, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." Jesus' view of the world, its history and culture was quite different from that of the disciples. Jesus saw beyond the white marbles and glittering plates of gold. He saw the magnificent temple with the eyes of God, not with the eyes of envy. He predicted the imminent doom of Herod's temple in A.D. 70 when it fell to the besieging army of Titus. The Roman army desecrated the temple and demolished it completely until not one stone was left on another, in order to take out the gold plates in between the stones.

Jesus' prophecy concerning the temple was also an allegory about the destiny of human civilization. All glorious things of this world are temporal. Nothing is permanent. When we look at a recent stride in science and technology, we marvel at the scope and speed of human achievements. Breakthroughs in electronics, telecommunications, genetic engineering, and medicine have made our lives more comfortable than ever before. There seems to be a promising future in human civilization. Yet, if we look at the world today with spiritual eyes, there are signs of decay everywhere. Morality and spirituality in our society have been on a steady decline. Most of all, sin is eating away the souls of many people, like cancer. We must open our eyes to see where this world is going. We must have a spiritual sense of history! All the glory of this world will crumble as did the temple of Herod the Great.

The disciples were surprised at Jesus' words and asked, "Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" (7) They asked him about the timing of the upcoming event and the telltale signs. Because of Jesus' shocking prediction, they began to think about the future of Jerusalem and the humanity. In response to their questions, Jesus talked mostly about the signs of the end of the age, although his disciples were more interested in the exact time. Jesus taught them several signs to watch out for in the end times.

First, "Watch out for false messiahs" (8). Look at verse 8. *He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."* False messiahs are people or things that give false hopes to unsuspecting people. In a troubled world where wars, rumors of wars, and all kinds of diseases and natural disasters are widespread, people seek to hold on to

something or someone. False messiahs exploit people with fear and anxiety; they try to deceive them and empty their pockets. Then, who are these false messiahs? I heard that today there are over 1,000 people around the world who claim to be Jesus. This kind of false messiah is easy to spot. There are other, well-disguised false messiahs. Many people are deceived by money and pleasure that seem to promise happiness. Young people would rather go to parties than study the word of God and worship the Lord.

Second, “These things must happen first” (9-11). The end of the age is marked with many ominous and dreadful signs. Look at verses 9. *“When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”* When the cold war ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people thought there wouldn’t be any more wars. They were wrong. We have seen terrible wars, ethnic cleansing, senseless killings in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe and South Asia. The war in Syria is still waging, and recent development in the Korean peninsula is ominous. Closer to home, hurricanes Harvey and Irma killed lives and inflicted hardships on many people. It is easy for us to become fearful when we see these terrible things. But God’s people should not be gripped with fear. Instead, we must turn to the word of God. Verse 9 says that these things must happen first. But these calamities are not an end themselves. The end is still to come. These ominous signs are merely a warning signal.

Third, “Everyone will hate you because of me” (12-19). The most distinctive sign of the end times is the rise of God-haters. Look at verse 12. *“But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.”* This terrible persecution happened to early Christians, as they refused to worship the Roman Emperor. They declared Jesus as their Lord even as they were put in prison and burned alive in Coliseum. Look at verse 17. *“Everyone will hate you because of me.”* Today, the world is full of God-haters. They hate the children of God. They falsely heap accusations on them. They look down on the children of God simply because they obey the word of God and follow his ways. For example, many people are silent about loud rock music, but they are intolerant of hymn singing in apartment buildings or college campuses. One father didn’t say much when his daughter was sleeping with a boy. But when she became Christian and tries to live a holy life, he began to persecute her. They persecute God’s children because they hate God. Persecutions are hard to endure. But Jesus gives us a promise. Let us read verses 17-19. *Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.* Matthew 5:10 says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus says that the time of persecution is an opportunity to witness the love of God. Look at verses 13-15. *And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.*

Fourth, “How dreadful it will be” (20-24). Overlooking the city of Jerusalem, Jesus continued. “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (20). As Jesus prophesied, the beautiful temple was destroyed in

A.D. 70 by the invading Roman army. And as was prophesied, after the destruction of Jerusalem, many people of Israel were dragged into captivity in foreign lands. It was to punish them because they did not maintain God's blessing (22). Look at verse 23. *How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!* To a woman, pregnancy is a time of joyful expectations, and a nursing mother is a symbol of human happiness. But at a time of calamity, even blessings such as pregnancy and nursing a child will become burdens. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a terrible event for the Israelites. But it was only foreshadow of what is to come in the future. As the day of judgment came to the Israelites, the day of God's final judgment will surely come.

II. THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING (25-38)

The human history as we know it will end with the second coming of our Lord Jesus. Let us read verse 27. *"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."* The day of Jesus' coming will be the day of great victory for all believers who go through persecutions for the sake of his name. We will see Jesus coming in a cloud with power and great glory. On the contrary, to those who hate God, the day of his coming will be a time of great punishment. On that day, there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken (25-26). To the children of God, Jesus' second coming will be the most glorious day. It will be the day we can stand up and lift up our heads to shout hallelujah! (28). In the past, the children of God were not praised or honored for their sacrificial lives of faith. But when the Son of Man comes again, they can stand up and lift up their heads to welcome the glorious coming of Jesus. This will surely happen, whether people believe it or not. Look at verses 32-33. *"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

The sinful humanity rejected the Son of God. They crucified Jesus on a cross and threw him outside the city wall of Jerusalem. They thought they would never see him again. But verse 27 says, "At that time they will see the Son of Man" They will see him with their own eyes, coming in a cloud with power and great glory. They must stand before him to be judged one by one (2Co 5:10). After judgment, they have to face eternal condemnation (Rev 21:8). On the other hand, this is the day of salvation and honor and final victory for those who have sacrificed and cried many tears for the sake of his name. Let us read verse 27 again. *"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."* This is the day we see Jesus face to face with great joy.

Look at verses 29-31. *He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."* Today people are very good at reading the signs of climates and seasons. We, the children of God, must have a spiritual insight to see the world from God's point of view, and to see that the future of believers will be glorious because Jesus will come again in his power and glory.

Now an important question to all of us--What should we be doing as we wait for Jesus' second coming? First, Jesus says we should live by faith in God. We should be watchful and prayerful. Look at verses 34-36. *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."* Jesus told the disciples to keep a constant watch for his return. Although 2,000 years have passed since he spoke these words, their truth remains. Christ is coming again, and we need to watch. This means working faithfully to carry out the mission that God has given us. We should not let our minds and spirits be weighed down by careless living, drinking, or the foolish pursuit of pleasure.

There are many signs of the end of the age. We don't know exactly when, but Jesus is surely coming again in his glory. Again, how can we be ready for this great event for Christians? We must be spiritually alert. We must be on the watch and pray (36). Instead of speculating on the time of his coming, we can be ready by doing what our Lord commanded us to do: to teach the word of God. That is what Jesus did as he prepared for his death and resurrection. Look at verses 37-38. *Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.*

In today's passage, we learn that human history is moving toward the Second Coming of Jesus Christ who will come in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. Jesus assures us that final victory is ours in him if we stand firm to the end. Knowing this, we can overcome the turbulent world with peace and confidence. May God plant the promise of the Second Coming of Jesus in our hearts!